



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
*1102 SE Quince Street • PO Box 47990
Olympia, Washington 98504-7990*

January 27, 2004

The Honorable Eileen Cody, Chair
House Health Care Committee
Post Office Box 40600
337 John L. O'Brien Bldg.
Olympia, Washington 98504-0600

Dear Representative Cody:

We are writing as the Chair of the State Board of Health and the Chair of the State Board of Health's Committee on Children's Health and Well-Being to share the Board's support for the goals of House Bills 2680 and 2760, which are scheduled to be heard before your committee on January 29, 2004.

The Board is very concerned about the rapidly rising rates of obesity among our youth and its wide range of attendant health risk factors. In fact, the Board has made it a priority to encourage local school boards to work with local boards of health to adopt policies and practices (based on science and best practice) to improve the fitness and nutritional well being of school-aged children.

Our first task was to encourage the creation of a "go to" source for the best information about this issue. Thanks to the efforts of the UW Center for Public Health Nutrition and the collaboration of a dozen public and private agencies, that site now exists. You can browse it at www.healthyschoolswa.org. It contains many of the resources parents, students, teachers, administrators and others need to improve school policies and practices in this critical area.

To promote awareness of the problem, to educate about the resources available and to energize local efforts to address this issue, the state Board met jointly with the Yakima Health District Board of Health and several local school board members from the Yakima area in a prototype community forum. We heard from the state Department of Health, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the University of Washington Center for Public Health Nutrition, the Washington State Public Health Association, the Washington State Parents, Teachers, and Students Association, the Washington State School Directors Association, the Children's Alliance, and many other groups about their efforts to improve school nutrition and physical activity. In addition, a number of local leaders from the Yakima area were invited, including: Marv Purvis, Director of Learning Support in ESD 105; Joyce Roth, Food Service Supervisor in the Toppenish School District; Betty Craig a Food Service Supervisor in the Wapato School District; John Piper and Corey Sinclair of the Toppenish School District; and staff from the Yakima Health District.

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At our Board meeting, we all learned the troubling truths from our expert panelists about our state's epidemic of childhood obesity. Local educators shared promising physical activity and nutrition programs and practices they currently offer, and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's office shared with all of us the help they are offering to districts to get in front of this problem. The leadership of our state's program called "Action for Healthy Kids" shared their model policies.

The afternoon was capped by the acceptance of the "Washington School Board Challenge" made by the Washington State Public Health Association and the state PTSA. Sponsored by the organic yogurt manufacturer Stonyfield Farm, the Challenge will award prizes next spring to the local school boards making the greatest progress in adopting model physical activity and nutrition policies and practices. The afternoon's agenda, including detailed presentation and descriptive materials is available at:

http://www.doh.wa.gov/sboh/Meetings%202003/Agendas_2003/2003-10_FinalAgenda.pdf

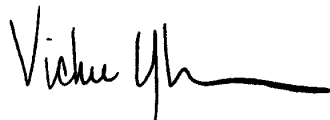
As part of our 2003-2005 work plan, the Board is currently working with six local health jurisdictions (in Cowlitz, Benton-Franklin, King, Pierce, Island, and Thurston counties) and with a host of others to develop and conduct similar community forums which will be tailored to support and reinforce local community efforts to improve children's physical activity and nutrition status. The forums will provide an opportunity for key members of SBOH to work with local boards of health and representatives of local school boards to promote effective program and policies that make it easier for children to choose health-promoting foods, be physically active, and be ready to learn at school.

In sum, the Board supports the concept of offering children more healthy food options in schools and would encourage schools to adopt sound policies and practices to improve the nutritional well being and fitness of its student populations. Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,



Linda Lake, M.B.A., Chair
Washington State Board of Health



Vickie Ybarra, R.N., Chair
Children's Health & Well-Being Subcommittee

Enclosure

cc: House Health Care Committee Members
Representative Shay Schual-Berke, M.D.
Washington State Board of Health Members
Mich'l Prentice Needham, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Steve Meyer, Department of Health